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# The **P**ALIMPSEST

SEPTEMBER 1930

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THE EDITOR

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THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA



### THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

*Superintendent*

### THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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COURTESY OF CHILD. PHOTOGRAPHER, GRINNELL

WILLIAM C. ROBINSON



# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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NO. 9

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## Billy Robinson, Bird-Man

It was in 1896 that Mrs. Franklin Robinson came with her three sons and a daughter to live in Grinnell. At that time Billy was no more than twelve years old, having been born in Redfield, North Dakota, on September 24, 1884. His father had died in Florida and the boys had to help support the family. Billy worked for the "handy man" at Grinnell, and lived with him after the rest of the family moved to Oskaloosa. When his brothers were killed in a mine explosion, his mother and sister returned to Grinnell.

Meanwhile Billy was learning the versatility of a general repair man. When the shop was sold he stayed on and worked for the new owner. Being of a mechanical disposition, he fixed bicycles with skill and imagination. When the motor age began he was well prepared to make recalcitrant one-cylinder automobile engines run, and well before the World



War ushered in the age of aviation he was dreaming and experimenting with heavier than air flying machines.

Billy Robinson, even in his maturity, was not a large man. Small of stature, he was nevertheless endowed with endurance much in excess of the physical proportions of his body. His quiet, courteous manner enabled him to meet his friends with dignified familiarity. And he had an innate enthusiasm that imparted a certain charm to his demeanor. Many who knew him remember the light which kindled in his eye when he spoke of his work and plans. Indeed, next to his mechanical genius, this enthusiasm for his profession, combined with unlimited courage, was the most prominent trait of his character.

Eventually Billy Robinson, in partnership with Charlie Hink, an expert mechanic, bought the repair shop. It was there, in that modest establishment, that he experimented with a revolving type of aeroplane engine. It was there he built his first flying machine, a monoplane of original design. Working alone, except for the assistance of his partner, he molded his own castings, welded the iron, and constructed both the motor and the plane according to his own ideas. His first engine went to pieces, but he profited by his early mistakes and finally produced a motor that became the pattern for modern airplane engines.

On June 17, 1910, a travelling show came to Grin-



nell. Billy had just completed his flying machine. Being anxious to exhibit the monoplane equipped with its home-made sixty horse power radial motor, he hauled it out to the fair grounds where the show was attracting a large crowd. Many of the people were more interested in the flying machine than the show. At least the manager of the show recognized the value of the plane as an advertising attraction, even though no flights were attempted. When the show pulled out early the next morning and went to another town, Billy Robinson and his monoplane went with it.

Realizing that he must learn to fly if his progress in aeronautics were to continue, Robinson made the acquaintance of Max Lily, an aviator of renown, and together they went to Florida for a year. There Lily taught him to fly. Upon his return he worked with his instructor in an aviation school in Chicago, teaching and experimenting. In the latter part of 1911 he became a partner in the National Aeroplane School where he stayed two years, returning to Grinnell in December, 1913.

During the years from 1914 to 1916, Billy Robinson, the bird-man, became well known in central Iowa. In his efforts to perfect his plane and motor he made many flights in the vicinity of Grinnell. He and his flying machine were familiar objects in every town within a radius of fifty miles. The roar of his motor never failed to bring people to their doors and into the street. In Grinnell the sight of



him sailing about in the sky became so common that he ceased to attract attention.

Nevertheless Grinnell was proud of Billy Robinson. A kind of glamour surrounded his achievements. Here was a Grinnell man who had won recognition as an inventor and become a premier flyer. On his own initiative and with his own tools he had pioneered in the conquest of the air. First in a monoplane and later in a biplane he toured the sky, not in the spirit of reckless adventure but for the sake of progress in a new style of transportation. He inspired confidence. When he organized the Grinnell Aeroplane Company citizens of Grinnell bought stock liberally. If he had lived a year or two longer Grinnell, with the advantage of an established airplane factory and flying school, might have been selected as the site of a military aviation training camp during the World War. And with such prestige the aviation center of the nation might have developed there. Billy Robinson's premature death was a distinct loss to Grinnell and to Iowa.

Billy Robinson achieved his greatest success on October 17, 1914. Sponsored by the Des Moines *Capital* and the Chicago *Tribune*, he took off from Des Moines that Saturday morning at 10:56 bound for Chicago on a non-stop flight. By the authority of the United States government he carried a package of letters from Des Moines and Grinnell.

The day was clear and calm when he set out. In approximately forty minutes he traversed the fifty-



five miles to Grinnell, sailing over his home town amid the blowing of whistles and the tumultuous applause of the people who crowded roofs and streets to cheer the daring aeronaut. At 12:57 he was sighted at Rochester and again over Clinton at 1:30. Farther east the sky was overcast and visibility steadily diminished. He was reported over Sycamore, about thirty miles west of Chicago, at 2:35. Then the clouds closed in so close to the earth that he dared not fly below them and, fearing that he might fly over Chicago and fall into Lake Michigan, he swung to the south and landed at Kentland, Indiana, about eighty miles southeast of Chicago. His gasoline was too low to risk going farther.

It was 3:40 when he came to earth, having been in the air four hours and forty-four minutes. During that time he travelled approximately three hundred and ninety miles, exceeding the American record by a hundred and twenty-five miles. He flew at the rate of eighty miles an hour. Sixteen years ago that was indeed a remarkable record — quite as significant as more recent transcontinental flights and refueling contests.

Having established a new non-stop flight record, Robinson turned his attention from the horizontal to the perpendicular and tried to fly higher than any one else. In 1916 the record was 17,000 feet, and Robinson had been up within 3000 feet of that height.

On March 11, 1916, he determined to enter the up-



per air and try again to beat the world's record if possible. It was 3:30 in the afternoon when a friend, Jesse Fellows, fastened a barograph to his machine and Billy started on his fatal flight. His wife and many others watched him. Up and up he climbed until his machine was lost in the blue of the sky. The general direction of his flight was southeast and about four o'clock the people near Ewart who were watching his flight heard a break in the steady throb of the engine and soon Billy's biplane was seen tossing hither and thither in an apparently aimless descent, like a piece of cardboard. Obviously the machine was out of control. Would the pilot be able to check his dizzy descent? Down, down, down, with ever increasing speed. And then, at the end, a hill mercifully hid the crash from the view of the spectators. When the first rescuers arrived the plane was ablaze and Robinson, horribly burned, was dead.

What happened away up in the rare atmosphere three or four miles above the earth? No one will ever know. Perhaps his heart failed under the strain of the high altitude. Maybe the motor ceased to function and in the too swift descent the plane could not be controlled. A physician expressed the opinion that the rapid descent caused high blood pressure which resulted in a cerebral hemorrhage. Probably he was unconscious before he hit the ground. His friends like to believe that he broke the altitude record and was returning elated over his



accomplishment when the accident occurred. The plane and instruments were completely wrecked, though the engine is preserved in the museum of Grinnell College as a memento of the mechanical genius of this pioneer aviator.

In Hazelwood Cemetery at Grinnell there stands a granite slab split from a lone boulder which the glacier deposited about a mile and a half from the city. It bears a bronze tablet on which are inscribed in gold letters these words:

This stone marks the resting place  
of  
William C. Robinson  
Pioneer non-stop flier and second  
authorized carrier of air mail  
He met death in his plane a few  
miles south of Grinnell when making  
an altitude flight March 11, 1916  
Erected by those who honor the  
memory of Billy Robinson

The body of Billy Robinson was buried with high honors, while his spirit of youthful enthusiasm, confident resourcefulness, and dauntless courage go soaring on. In death as in life he was at once an inspiration and a symbol.

W. G. RAY



## Destination — Unknown

“Contact!” rang the command in the clear still air of the June morning.

A hush of anticipation settled upon the eager crowd that had assembled on Roosevelt Field. The Whirlwind motor of the Bellanca roared, the plane trembled, and then began to lumber slowly down the field. But the crowd barred the way and Clarence Chamberlin, the slim-faced pilot of the plane, was compelled to taxi back up the field for another trial. As police cleared a lane, he shoved the throttle wide open again. Down the runway sped the heavy-laden Bellanca. But again the crowd pushed forward and, to avoid hitting any one, Chamberlin swung the plane off the course on to the sodded field.

Suddenly, just ahead loomed disaster! A foot stake, marking the runway boundary, stood directly in line with the Bellanca's whirling propeller. Too late now to turn aside. Chamberlin held his breath. Then, miraculously, the stake slipped though the propeller between revolutions. The plane began to lift into the air and a few minutes after five by the sun on June 4, 1927, the Bellanca roared out over Long Island. Destination — unknown.

Before reaching Cape Cod, the expensive earth inductor compass with which the plane was equipped went “out” completely. What to do? There still



remained the old magnetic compass, but it was to have been used merely as a reassuring check on the more precise instrument. The part of wisdom would be to get the crippled compass repaired, but the thought of turning back, of once more delaying the long awaited transatlantic flight, was appalling to Chamberlin. For his part, he preferred to trust the magnetic compass and go on. But would his passenger and sponsor, Charles A. Levine, be willing to take such desperate chances?

"Go ahead", responded Levine. "I'd rather be in Davy Jones's locker than go back and face those newspaper men."

And so the *Bellanca* "went ahead", its pilot once more demonstrating the daring qualities which had characterized him from the time he, as a boy, had narrowly escaped death when the motor "bike" on which he was racing around a half mile dirt track turned on a curve and hurled him through the guard rail. Nothing daunted, young Chamberlin had picked himself up, jumped astride his motorcycle, and — won the race!

It is peculiarly significant that Clarence Chamberlin should have been born on November 11, 1893, just twenty-five years before the Armistice ended his war-time aerial experience and embarked him upon a much more epoch-making career.

His father, a jeweler and watchmaker, possessed the first motor car in Denison, "an asthmatic, one-cylinder Oldsmobile, that chugged away terrifyingly



downhill and even on the level, when it was going good, but inevitably 'died' when called on to negotiate a stiff grade, without someone to give it a helping push." As the nine-year-old Clarence was of little use at pushing, he acquired the proud position of chauffeur, his father sitting beside him "ready to hop out and push at just the right time". But to the citizens of Denison this "new-fangled horseless carriage" was a positive menace and they even held a public mass meeting for the purpose of condemning "Elzie Chamberlin and that infernal contraption his boy, Clarence, drives through the streets of Denison."

A few years later the citizens were bewailing the new "infernal contraption" of "that Chamberlin boy" — and many predicted that he would "break his neck with that fool motorcycle". But young Chamberlin managed to escape such a casualty. Even when he took his life in his hands and negotiated several turns around the carnival airdrome on his motorcycle, he came out unscathed. Perhaps it was because, to Clarence, himself, these were not "reckless stunts", but difficult feats so carefully planned that success was certain.

In school, Clarence was an "average" student, caring particularly for science and math — he spent much extra time in the high school laboratory. After graduating from Denison High School in 1911, he attended the Denison Normal and Business College and in the fall of 1912 enrolled for the



course in electrical engineering at the Iowa State College, Ames.

The summer following Chamberlin's second year of college, he acquired the agency for Harley-Davidson motorcycles in Denison and so great was his enthusiasm for this new business that when fall came he found he had tied up in cycles and spare parts the money with which he had expected to go back to school. Plans for college were abandoned and he spent the year selling motorcycles and tinkering with automobiles.

One of his jobs was to act as chauffeur for Charles W. Tabor who lived in Denison. In the summer of 1915 Mr. Tabor decided to take a six-month's motor tour of the West and it was during this trip that Clarence saw his second airplane — an early type flying boat that was taking up passengers at San Diego for \$25 each. The first plane he had seen, in 1910, an old-style "pusher" type, had failed to impress Chamberlin, but his early apathy toward aviation had vanished and he was eager for a ride. Mr. Tabor, however, did not share his enthusiasm.

"You can risk your fool neck in one of them some other time," he said, "but right now I've got a lot more places on the Coast that I want to visit. What's more, I don't intend looking around for another driver to get me back home. None of this flying business for you, young fellow!"

But Mr. Tabor had not reckoned with the entrance



of the United States into the World War. On Thanksgiving Day, 1917, the "young fellow" journeyed to Fort Omaha, intent on becoming an aviator. It was not until March, 1918, however, that instructions finally came "to proceed without delay" to the United States School of Military Aeronautics at Champaign, Illinois.

After eleven weeks of difficult class work and even more strenuous drill and discipline, Ground School was over at last! Orders came through that Chamberlin's squadron was to be sent to Chanute Field, at Rantoul, Illinois, to begin actual flying. Their first period of practice flying consisted of making landings and Landings and LANDINGS! Then the time came when they were allowed to make solo flights, to work on "spirals" and "eights". Then there were final tests to determine whether the cadet was to wear the Reserve Military Aviation silver wings — landings over a "hurdle", landings for a mark with the motor idling, and with the motor "dead" as in forced landings. After the "acrobatic stage" had been passed, only a few days of formation flying and a cross-country flight or two remained. It was a long, strenuous procedure with *Practice* as the ruling god, but it did make flyers.

On July 15th, Chamberlin was transferred to Camp Dick at Dallas, Texas, where he remained for a week or ten days before being transferred to Wilbur Wright Field, Fairfield, Ohio, for a course in the machine gun school there. It was with joy that



he and the other members of the squadron welcomed the transfer to Payne Field, West Point, Mississippi, on September 1st, where they spent the time flying Jennies and living in hopes of overseas orders. On November 1st they received instructions to "proceed" at once to Hoboken, New Jersey, and be ready to take the first available transport. The signing of the Armistice on November 11th, however, thwarted Chamberlin's first start to Germany.

His chief concern then was to obtain leave to go home for Christmas. But it is one thing to obtain a furlough and quite another to overstay it, so that it was not without some trepidation that Lieutenant Chamberlin reported late. Perhaps his fear would have been greater had not "that auburn-haired Bogert girl" returned with him, for they had been married on January 3rd. Colonel Hurd agreed, however, that "she was reason enough for reporting late."

Chamberlin remained in the Army until July 2nd when he tendered his resignation. What should he do then? Friends advised him to quit flying for good and go into business, so he went to work in the jewelry store with his father. Mending watches proving "pretty quiet", he took charge of a talking machine line his father had added to the business and spent most of his time going around the country selling machines.

Then one day, while engaged in repairing a clock, he heard the whir of an airplane flying over Deni-



son. The sound of the motor made the flying fever race in his blood anew. Rushing out into the street, he watched the plane pass, utterly miserable.

Somehow, though, he endured the yearning until spring when the joyful news came that the Bellanca plane he had ordered months before was ready for delivery. He immediately went east for the plane, having decided to stay there until he could make enough money barnstorming to bring the plane home. But in the fall, when the barnstorming period was over, he worked his way back to Roosevelt Field, Long Island, which even then had become a center for "gypsy" flyers.

One morning as he started to warm up the motor of his ship, it back-fired and the plane burst into flames. The exorbitant price of \$640 which he had paid for a six months insurance policy was a very good investment after all. Instead of meeting the policy with cash, the insurance company suggested he take a standard training plane which they had acquired. Not being sure that he could get a plane which would suit him for the amount due on his policy, Chamberlin accepted the company's offer.

But the post-war slump had struck aviation and people were no longer interested in paying \$15 a hop for straight flying and \$25 to "get the works". It was necessary to find another source of income. About this time Chamberlin went into partnership with an old flying acquaintance, the plan being to buy a shipment of English war planes that were to



be sold for customs duty. They assembled the planes and Chamberlin's job was to test the ships, demonstrate, and sell them. About all he received from the partnership, however, was "a bare living and a lot of bitter experience", for he had no written contract and by the time the planes had finally been disposed of, his partner had apparently forgotten all about their original "fifty-fifty" agreement.

From this disappointing experience, Chamberlin turned to photographic work, at first acting as pilot for newspaper photographers when they needed an aerial "shot"; but later, assuming the dual rôle of pilot and photographer, he was frequently called on by the New York papers to go and "shoot" a story on extremely short notice.

He was once detailed to get some pictures of the World Series crowd for the rotogravure section of the *Times*. The forms were due to close at three o'clock in the afternoon, and the crowd picture could not be taken until two. Chamberlin got the "shots" all right and then hurried to Riverside Drive at Eighty-sixth Street where the *Times* had a man waiting for him. By the time he got there he had fastened the package of plates to a paper parachute and had it all ready to toss overboard. The 'chute opened beautifully and down floated the plates into the arms of his assistant. Less than an hour after the pictures had been snapped, they were ready to go into the Sunday papers.

Disillusionment and failure in a venture never

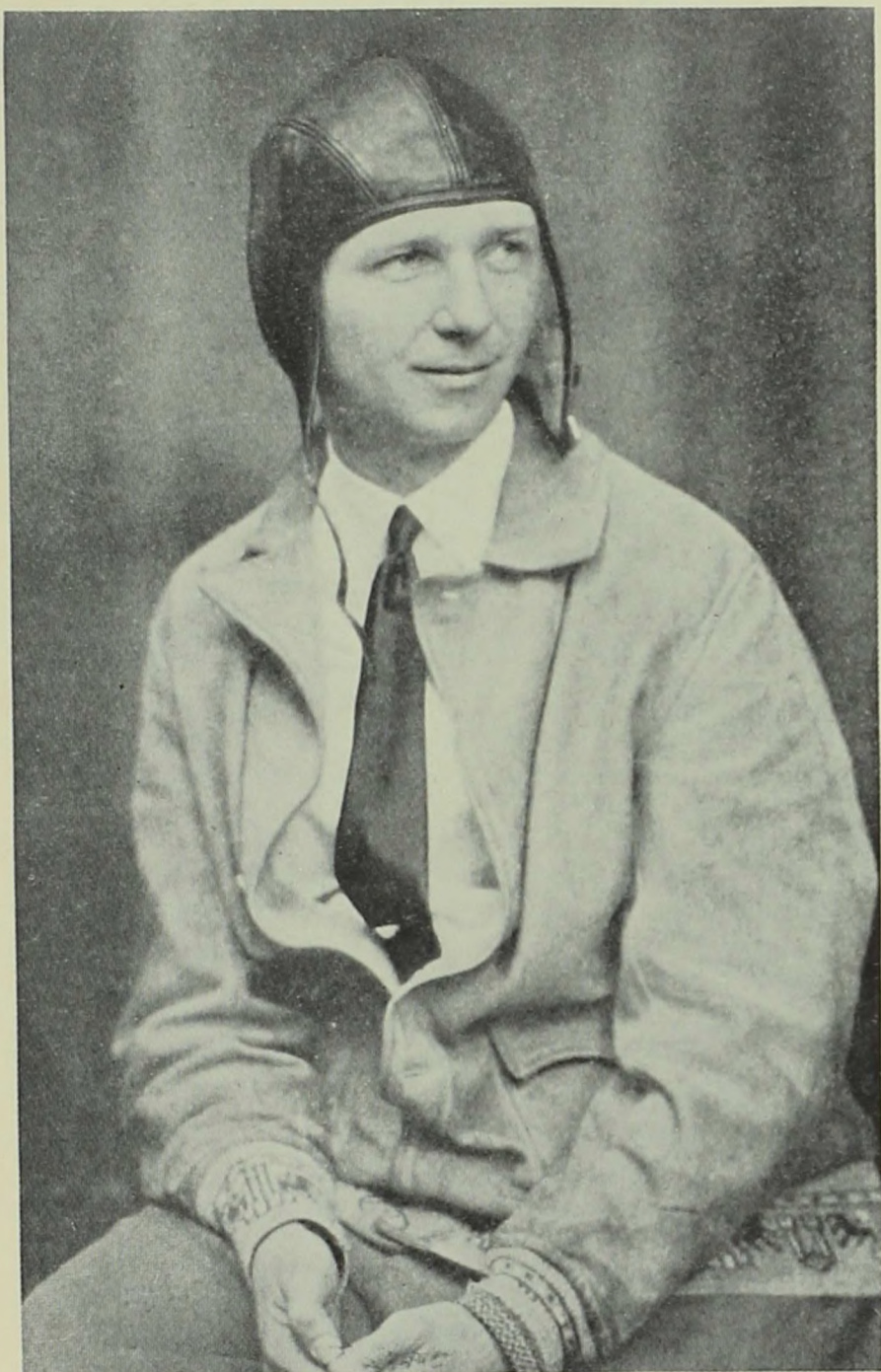


discouraged Clarence Chamberlin from trying again and in 1924 he formed another partnership for reconditioning surplus war planes. Fortunately, this proved much more profitable than his first experience had been. But winter of that year found their stock of airplanes almost exhausted, so the partnership was dissolved and again Chamberlin was compelled to rely for his income on odd jobs of flying, interspersed by occasional air races.

It was in one of these races in 1925 that Chamberlin met with his only really serious accident, although he had crashed about ten planes due to faulty motors or poor landing fields. On this particular occasion, he was flying an old Bellanca biplane which he had converted into a braced wing monoplane. Having finished it in a hurry in order to enter the race, he had had no chance to try it except on his way from Hasbrouck Heights to Mitchel Field. One wing had a tendency to drop down at high speed and he told himself that the only way to beat this was not to fly "wide open" in the race. Afterward, he could correct the fault.

Thinking that everything would be all right, he consented to let a youthful aviation enthusiast climb in with him. All went well until a plane tried to pass him on one of the turns. Instinctively he opened the throttle. They had been flying fairly low, and when the wing dropped suddenly Chamberlin could not get the plane up again before it hit a telephone line. His companion was killed and





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CLARENCE D. CHAMBERLIN



Chamberlin, himself, suffered a broken right leg and ankle and a badly strained back.

After paying his hospital bill, he had exactly \$9.75 ready money and the far from cheering words of doctors and acquaintances that "he was all through flying", that "a man never gets over a bad crack-up". But they did not know this man. Instead of becoming downcast at their predictions, he got "sore". He'd "show these pessimists they were all wrong". And he did. Before his leg was out of a cast, he was up in the air going through all the maneuvers he knew to prove to himself, and the world at large, that Clarence D. Chamberlin was far from being through with flying.

This crash did not improve the Wright company's opinion of him as a "wild and reckless" pilot, however, and his desire to obtain a connection with that firm might not have been consummated had it not been for an event which occurred late in the fall of 1926. Charles L. Lawrance, president of the Wright Aeronautical Corporation, wanted to fly down to Norfolk, Virginia, for the Schneider Cup Races, and, finding no other pilot available, he was obliged to take "that crazy Chamberlin".

At Logan Field, Baltimore, they stopped for gasoline, and had proceeded but a short way farther when the supposedly infallible Whirlwind motor coughed once or twice and died. They were over a real estate sub-division on the shores of Chesapeake Bay and Mr. Lawrance undoubtedly had visions of



landing in ice-cold water. His concern increased no doubt when he saw that Chamberlin was heading directly for the building lots instead. But to Chamberlin, after all of his small field practice, landing on a triangular corner lot was, to quote him, "a cinch".

They located the trouble: some water in the gasoline had frozen in the carburetor. A little later, over a wooded stretch of country, the motor passed out again. Chamberlin sideslipped into a clearing and rolled to a stop in a farmer's back yard with just enough space to spare. The carburetor was thawed out again, Chamberlin made a quick take-off, and the next landing was at the Naval Air Station near Norfolk.

After this, Clarence Chamberlin was "ace-high" with Mr. Lawrance and acted as pilot for him whenever he wished to go any place by air. When motors were to be tested, Chamberlin was sent up in the service plane to put them through their revolutions, and when the Wright company wanted some publicity for the fuel economy of their Whirlwind engine, they had him run off a series of flight tests to determine just what motor speed and fuel mixture would give the most mileage on the least gas.

It had been largely through Chamberlin's influence that Guiseppe M. Bellanca had been brought in contact with the Wright company and provision made for the construction of a Wright-Bellanca monoplane under his supervision. Chamberlin and



Bellanca had been friends ever since the time, just after the war, when Chamberlin had purchased the first Bellanca plane manufactured.

Therefore in 1927, when the Wright company sold the Bellanca monoplane to the Columbia Aircraft Corporation — a concern formed by Mr. Bellanca and Charles A. Levine — Chamberlin went along with the plane in very much the same capacity as he had with the Wright organization.

On April 12, 1927, Clarence Chamberlin and Bert Acosta took off in the Bellanca with three hundred seventy-five gallons of gasoline and a duration-flight goal of fifty hours. The "experts" said it could not be done, that the plane would not even be able to get off the ground. By the end of ten minutes, however, the Bellanca was cruising along easily at an altitude of two thousand feet. Sometime during the second day their water supply was exhausted, and they ate the last of their food soon afterward. But they had no intention of landing on that account. By seven o'clock on the morning of the 14th, they had eclipsed the former world record, and it was more than six hours later before the wheels of their plane touched the ground. A new world record of 51 hours, 11 minutes, 25 seconds had been set.

After this achievement, it seemed inevitable that Acosta and Chamberlin should be chosen as co-pilots of the Bellanca on its next great adventure — the oft-discussed dream of a New York to Paris flight.

To Chamberlin, this meant the realization of his



crowning ambition; it meant that the lean hard years of struggle and sacrifice had not been in vain; and it also meant that his unswerving devotion to aviation would not go unrewarded.

But Mr. Levine had different plans. His choice of Lloyd W. Bertaud, veteran of the United States air mail service and an excellent flyer, as co-pilot with Acosta, was not based alone on Bertaud's unquestionable ability as a pilot, but also because he, like Acosta, was tall and powerfully built — veritable "movie" types. It was Levine's belief that motion picture offers would "pour in" as soon as the plane landed in Paris and, as he would share in any profits which might accrue from these anticipated contracts, he was averse to having Chamberlin, who was of slender physique and rather quiet and unassuming in demeanor, pilot the ship. He might be fully as capable of flying across the Atlantic but his appearance on the screen would not be as attractive as the other two. What irony!

Bellanca did not share Levine's enthusiasm for a "movie-type" pilot and issued the ultimatum that unless Chamberlin was allowed to make the flight, he was through with the whole undertaking. Thus matters drifted along and the Bellanca's crew was still "Bertaud and Acosta or Chamberlin" on April 24th, the day set for Mr. Levine's nine-year-old daughter, Eloyse, to christen the plane "Columbia".

After the christening, Eloyse and her girl friend pleaded for a ride in the plane. This seemed a very



fitting climax to the ceremonies and the girls were lifted in at the window beside Chamberlin. Laughing and chatting, they waved a merry farewell to their parents and friends.

But a flyer who was watching the take-off noticed that a pin in the left shock absorber had been sheared off as the Columbia bounced into the air. This allowed the strut to drop out of its fuselage fitting and caused the left wheel to swing in under the body. Chamberlin must be warned at once! If he tried to land without knowing that the entire left side of the landing gear was useless, a bad wreck would undoubtedly ensue.

Two mechanics raced to get a wheel and Dean C. Smith, a veteran pilot of the Air Mail, borrowed a Curtiss Oriole, and flew up with one of the mechanics and the wheel to signal Chamberlin.

"I wonder why those darn fools are waving a tire at me?" Chamberlin thought. "Probably they want a race. Well, here's where their Oriole gets a fine trimming."

But both Smith and the mechanic waved so frantically as the Columbia leaped ahead of their slow biplane, that Chamberlin knew there must be something the matter. Looking over at his landing gear, he quickly located the trouble. The girls, meanwhile, were giggling delightedly at the peculiar antics of Smith and his Oriole.

On the ground, Mr. and Mrs. Levine watched anxiously, and the clanging of an ambulance behind



them served only to heighten their fear. Would Chamberlin be able to make a safe landing? It was an extremely difficult feat, and Mrs. Levine stood, handkerchief pressed tightly to her lips, eyes strained skyward as she watched Chamberlin maneuver the Columbia back and forth, endeavoring to get it in just the right position.

Then, with the Columbia headed into the wind, Chamberlin leveled off for a landing, and banked the Columbia over to the right so that when she finally touched the slick wet grass, it was in a "three point landing" — tail skid, right wheel, and right wing tip. The Columbia stopped without going on her nose and without even tearing the fabric on the wings where they had skidded along the ground. Chamberlin had amply demonstrated his ability as a pilot in this perfect landing.

"Thank you for the ride, Mr. Chamberlin," called the girls as they were lifted from the plane, and if they were a little disappointed at being cheated out of the promised crash, their parents were not.

A reporter remarked to Levine the next day that he supposed Chamberlin's performance in the rescue had definitely settled the question of his being allowed to make the transatlantic flight.

"Why should it?" asked Levine. But when Acosta wrote a letter to Levine the following day resigning in favor of Chamberlin, Mr. Levine agreed to let Chamberlin go as co-pilot with Bertaud.

It was not all clear sailing yet, however, and dis-



agreement between Bertaud and Levine over the terms of the contract finally resulted in Bertaud's withdrawal from the flight altogether and in the decision of Mr. Levine, himself, to accompany Chamberlin, although his going was kept a secret until the day of the flight. Levine had had a little experience with handling the controls and he enlarged this knowledge by accompanying Chamberlin on every instrument testing flight, learning all he could about handling the ship and familiarizing himself with the action of the bank and turn indicator and the inclinometer. When the time came for the transatlantic flight, he could fly the plane fairly well in daylight and under good conditions.

But it was under much different circumstances that Levine was called upon to handle the controls during their transatlantic flight. Dusk of the second day out found them over Land's End, England, and the temptation was great to land on that hospitable shore. Chamberlin, however, set the Columbia resolutely on her course toward Berlin, climbing above the low clouds that had already closed in solidly over the land. But as they advanced, the clouds rose higher and higher and the altimeter needle crept steadily upward — 10,000, 15,000, 20,000 feet the Columbia climbed, until she had reached her limit; and still she had not surmounted the menacing barrier of clouds. The only thing to do was to see-saw back and forth along the western slope of the cloud range and wait for daylight.



The bitter cold, exhaustion, and the unusual strain of handling the Columbia in the rarefied atmosphere began to tell on Chamberlin and when dawn came he called Levine.

"See what you can do with her for awhile. I've got to have some rest." And he shoved back on the gas tank exhausted.

All went well for ten or fifteen minutes; then something happened. Levine became hopelessly bewildered and utterly without sense of direction, bringing the plane up into a stall which sent her off on her left wing, nose down, in a steep and dizzy spiral. Chamberlin's lethargy slipped away from him, but even in the short time required for him to slide into the pilot's seat, the Columbia's wings had started shuddering as though they would be ripped from the fuselage. Never in his life had Chamberlin "felt that death was so close or been so badly scared." The rudder bar was being whipped back and forth with leg-breaking force and the rear end of the plane was shaking so violently that the whole tail was about to be torn off. Down, down, down, went the plane, the altimeter needle sweeping past the hundred-foot marks like the indicator of a swift elevator clicking off floors in a great office building.

The first thing Chamberlin did was to "smother" the rudder with his feet in a progressive choking-down maneuver that stopped its wild oscillations. Then he ruddered out of the spiral dive into which they had fallen until the bank and turn indicator in-



formed him that they were going straight ahead. It was then a simple matter to pull up the nose of the Columbia until the indicators showed she was nearing level flight once more.

In writing of it later, Chamberlin observed: "I can see that this all sounds easy, but in actual accomplishment it was a difficult matter, probably the hardest job I ever faced in my life. Certainly I never want to meet such a situation again."

They had fallen into trouble at approximately 21,000 feet and the needle of the altimeter stood at 4000 feet before the Columbia was under control.

The clouds grew thinner and began to break. Through an open space the flyers saw a river below. Presently they noticed a glow of lights from a series of blast furnaces at the edge of a manufacturing town. Some white flares being fired into the air at one side of the town, attracted their attention, and they flew toward them. There they discovered a flying field and, throttling the motor, Chamberlin swept down ten or fifteen feet above the heads of the attendants calling, "Nach Berlin? Nach Berlin?" They all pointed in approximately the same direction so Chamberlin set the Columbia on the course indicated. Only about ten gallons of gasoline remained — enough for another hundred miles.

It was about four in the morning when they left Dortmund and shortly before six their gas gauge stood at zero. The country over which they were flying was flat and Chamberlin wanted to make a



landing near one of the larger villages while they still had a few pints of gasoline, but Levine proposed to fly "to the last drop". Ten or fifteen minutes later, the engine started coughing and Chamberlin negotiated a landing in a wheat field. It was a few minutes after six o'clock in Germany, on the morning of June 6th. The Columbia had been in the air forty-three hours and had broken Lindbergh's long distance flying record by nearly three hundred miles.

They had landed on a farm near the town of Eisleben, and their chief thought was to refuel as quickly as possible and fly on to Berlin. A truck finally drove up with about twenty gallons of gasoline but as the funnel which the driver had brought along could not be used in the cabin tank, they had to use a teapot with a long curved snout proffered by one of the women in the crowd. As the teapot held only a quart, it was an hour before the tedious task was done and they were ready to start again.

The crowd had pointed out Berlin to them as being a hundred miles away "in that direction", but Levine and Chamberlin could not agree as to just "what" direction "that" was and an hour and a half later found them over Kottbus. They flew ahead another twenty-five miles and being dangerously low in gas by this time, swung around and headed back for Kottbus. Five miles short of the airport there, the last of their gasoline gone, they were forced down into what proved to be a soggy pasture and the Co-



lumbia stood on her nose in the mud, snapping off the bottom blade of her propeller.

Neither Levine nor Chamberlin was hurt. Soon the bürgermeister of Kottbus whisked them off to a hotel. Word was flashed to Berlin of the flyers' arrival and of their need of a new propeller, whereupon a fleet of airplanes set out at once to greet them. In the afternoon of the following day they flew to Berlin in the Columbia, reaching there about six o'clock. Thousands of people were massed about the borders of Tempelhof Field and a wild bedlam of enthusiastic "Hochs!" rent the air as the "sun suddenly pierced the drizzle of rain and framed the Columbia in an iridescent rainbow" as the flyers landed. Ambassador Schurman was the first to greet them and escorted them to the embassy. The next morning President von Hindenburg received them.

A round of receptions, luncheons, teas, dinners, and other affairs followed, interspersed with visits to various airplane factories and motor works, and even a trip to the "Hollywood of Germany". After the arrival of Mrs. Chamberlin and Mrs. Levine on June 17th, the party visited Munich, Vienna, Budapest, Prague, Warsaw, Berne, and thence to Paris — Chamberlin and Levine flying the Columbia and the rest of the party travelling by train. After an enjoyable week in Paris they flew to London and on July 12th, Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlin sailed on the *Leviathan* for home. So ended the most dramatic episode in the life of Clarence Chamberlin.



He had scarcely landed in New York when he was asked by the United States Lines to attempt a demonstration ship-to-shore flight from the *Leviathan*. A special platform was built on the top deck of the ship and on the morning of August 1st Chamberlin opened the throttle, "jumped" both wheels over the restraining blocks, and before the plane was three-quarters of the way down the platform, it took the air. The demonstration had gone off without a hitch and forty minutes later Chamberlin was above Long Island. In the first ship-to-shore flight from a passenger vessel, Chamberlin had definitely established the feasibility of using a short runway instead of the catapult method of launching a plane.

It was not until two weeks later that Denison had an opportunity to pay tribute to its hero. On August 18th, Clarence Chamberlin, "extremely calm, good-humored and self-possessed", neither "awkwardly modest about his achievement or overly impressed with what he had done", arrived in a private car to receive his home-town welcome.

In June, 1928, when Chamberlin was appointed Aeronautic Engineer of New York City to act as consultant on the construction of the municipal airport on Barren Island, at a salary of \$1000 a month, the *New York Times* commented: "A year ago Chamberlin was merely a good pilot who held an endurance record, and today he is looked upon as one of the ablest fliers in the world."

During that year he succeeded in fulfilling his



cherished dream of producing a "flivver" airplane, for he believed that the United States needed a "medium-priced, reliable, reasonably 'foolproof' airplane of small size and good performance". On September 15, 1928, he bought a factory and ten acres of land in Jersey City to be used jointly by the Chamberlin Aeronautical Corporation and the Crescent Aircraft Corporation. Chamberlin, himself, served as technical adviser and director until March, 1929, when he was elected president of the Crescent Aircraft Company. More recently he has headed a corporation for the construction of a commercial airport at Doyer's Point in Jersey City to be used eventually as the eastern terminus of an air freight line between New York and Chicago. He is interested in establishing a series of flying schools. In July, 1930, he was appointed chairman of an aviation advisory board for the New York City police department.

The career of Clarence Chamberlin is a story of countless disappointments, of hopes deferred and plans continually thwarted only to be revived again. Why did Chamberlin finally succeed? Perhaps the answer may be found in his own article, "Shall We Let Our Children Fly?" to which he replies, "You can't stop them."

DOROTHY WAGNER



## Good News

In May of 1928 the Des Moines *Register* and *Tribune* took delivery of a five-place Fairchild cabin monoplane, valued at \$14,000, and became, so far as the record shows, the first newspaper organization to own and operate regularly an airplane of the new commercial type. Somewhat earlier the Chicago *Daily News* had acquired a converted DeHaviland military plane such as then were being used in the air mail service.

Reasons for acquiring the big monoplane — it was then considered big — were various. It was considered that genuine service to the news departments could be rendered, especially in the speeding up of picture procurement and in the rapid transportation of staff writers. It was considered also that there would be practical gains to the *Register* and *Tribune* in the way of general prestige. American newspapers feel it important to keep near the head of the procession. Values to other-than-news departments of the papers were also believed to exist in plane ownership, though those remained mostly to be discovered after acquirement.

Apart from all reasons of this type, there was the belief that much service could be given to Iowa, as commercial aeronautics developed, by a stimulation of early interest in developing airports, by



encouraging and developing air mail and air passenger lines, by furthering the development of flight instruction schools of high grade within the State, and by fostering, if possible, aeronautic manufacturing industries or industries serving aeronautics.

It was believed that a modern airplane, steadily but conservatively operated by Iowa newspapers, would by its very example as well as by various specific uses help win for Iowa its proper "place in the sun" aeronautically.

The record of this first modern commercial cabin plane operated regularly in Iowa (if an Anzani-powered ship owned years earlier by W. B. Swaney, one of the State's real aeronautic pioneers, and perhaps one or two other smaller craft can be excepted) is considered by its newspaper owners to be satisfactory, as is attested by the purchase this spring of a new and larger cabin monoplane, an eight-place Stinson, with practically double the horse-power, considerably greater speed, more modern instrument equipment, and greater passenger luxury.

The record of the Fairchild begins with its flight from New York to Des Moines immediately after delivery to the newspapers by the factory. It began its active life with the advantage of a clever name, "Good News", produced by a State-wide contest in which several thousand Iowans participated. That name, incidentally, has been continued as "Good News II" in the case of the new Stinson.

Shortly after its arrival in Des Moines, "Good

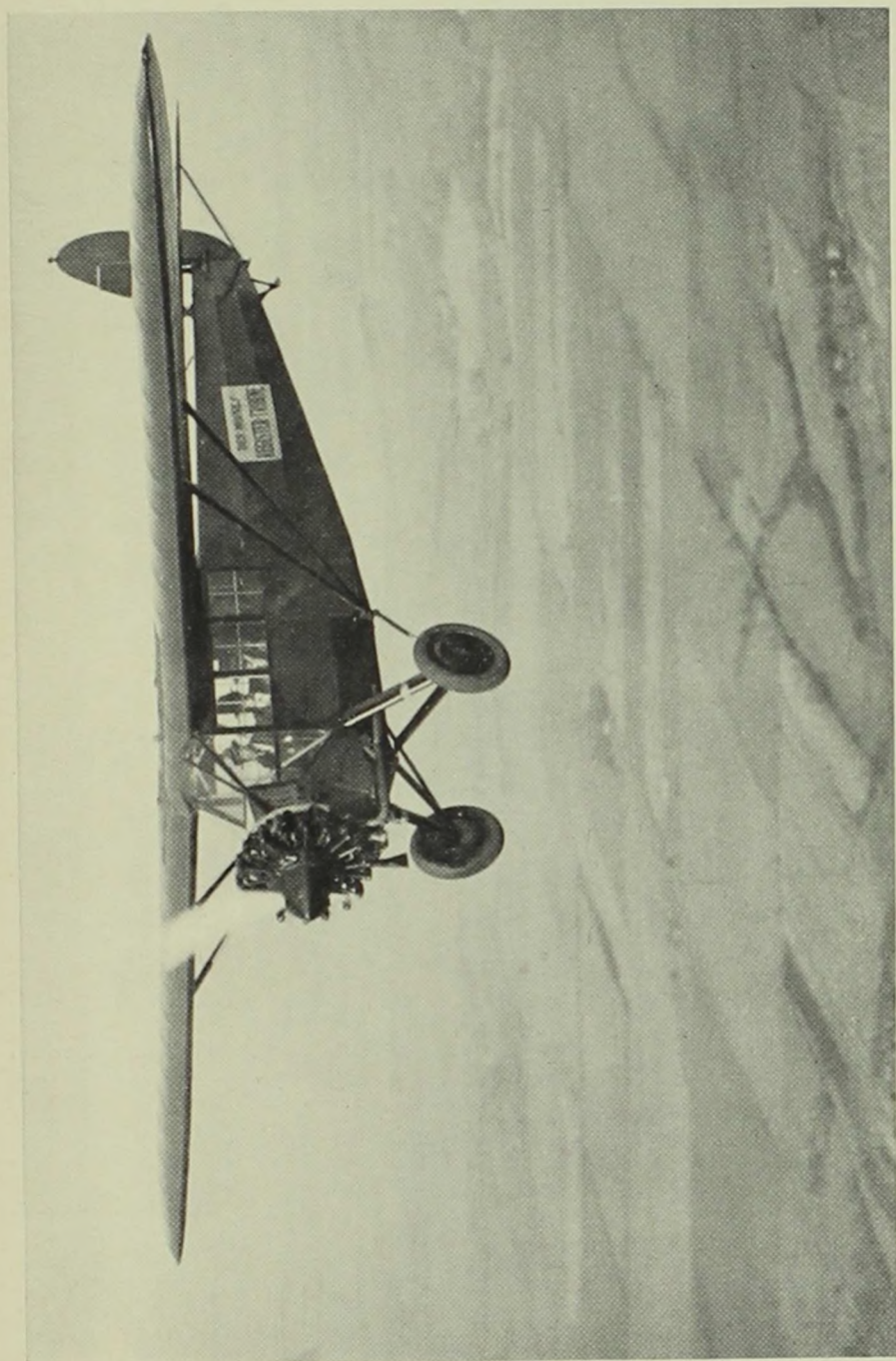


News" was the inspiration of probably the most impressive aeronautic event in the State's history — the Iowa Aeronautics Day celebration in late May of 1928 at the Des Moines municipal airport. The original idea of this day was a dedicatory ceremony for "Good News". The idea quickly outgrew this first form, and the dedication of "Good News" became a very minor incident of the program. With that trend the newspapers were delighted, for it was precisely by this sort of stimulation to general aeronautic interest that they hoped to make "Good News" most broadly serviceable.

Before a literally huge crowd, estimated at around 40,000, various field improvements as well as "Good News" were dedicated, and a thrilling aerial program was put on by the First Army Pursuit Squadron of eighteen planes from Selfridge Field, Michigan. President Coolidge at the White House pressed a button that fired a cannon on the field and started the ceremonies.

In the two years of steady flying activity that followed, the red monoplane became quite familiar in nearly all of Iowa and in various neighboring States. It was the "official ship" of two annual Iowa "Good Will" air tours, in 1928 and 1929, leading the other tour ships by an hour on each lap. It took part in many airport dedications in Iowa, and was always, as a matter of policy, kept ready to aid in such things. Often it carried speakers or other notables to aeronautic celebrations in the State.





COURTESY OF THE DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE

GOOD NEWS



Governor Hammill, for instance, was a passenger on various occasions. "Good News" also visited a number of district and county fairs, in places where landing fields existed, and it carried aloft, not only in Des Moines but at other airports in the State, many Iowans for their first flights. Particular effort was made to invite State and city officials, leaders of commercial organizations, fair officials, newspaper publishers and editors, and others whose interest in flying, if it could be awakened, would be likely to benefit their communities and the State's general aeronautic development.

All told, counting approximately five hundred *Register* and *Tribune* employees who were taken up either for "hops" or long flights, "Good News" in its two years of activity, though its passenger capacity was only four besides the pilot, gave rides to almost exactly three thousand persons, practically all Iowans, and most of them previously unacquainted with air travel.

"Good News" put down at forty-five cities in Iowa, seven in Missouri, two in Nebraska, two in Illinois, one in Kansas, one in Michigan, one in Minnesota, and one in Wisconsin — many separate times, of course, at some of these towns. It made, in all, eleven hundred and fourteen flights. The hours of work "put on" the Wright motor totaled approximately eight hundred. The mileage covered was not much below 80,000, or more than three times the earth's circumference. And in all that



flying there were four "forced landings", so called, only one of them being due to real mechanical trouble — a magneto that, though normally waterproof, got rain-soaked in a flight through heavy rains from Des Moines to Sioux City. The plane was never damaged in any landing. No one was even slightly hurt in connection with its operation. As one of the purposes of its operation was to prove the possibility of safety with prudent handling, this record was pleasing.

The pilot of "Good News" during practically all its career as a newspaper plane was Charles W. Gatschet, a veteran flyer. He is piloting now the successor plane, "Good News II".

In services of direct value to the *Register* and *Tribune* as newspapers, "Good News" carried staff writers and photographers, and occasionally editors and officers of the *Register* and *Tribune* company, including for instance Cartoonist J. N. Darling, to scenes of important happenings. The Republican National Convention in Kansas City was one such. The passage of the Graf Zeppelin across southern Iowa on its round-the-world flight was another. Tornadoes in different parts of Iowa, floods, numerous important sporting events such as football games, and other events altogether too many for listing were "covered" swiftly by the newspapers through use of the plane. It was sometimes possible on a Saturday afternoon to drop staff photographers at three different cities, to pick up pictures



of football games later, and to have all the pictures in the earliest editions of the *Sunday Register* for sports enthusiasts to see.

All the State's largest cities were photographed at high altitudes, up to 15,000 feet, with special Fairchild camera equipment, and the pictures later printed in the Sunday photogravure section. Often the camera was ten, fifteen, or even twenty miles distant from the remoter parts of the picture shown.

Important service of various sorts was also given to the non-news departments of the papers.

A number of special editions of the *Evening Tribune* were delivered by the plane to Iowa towns, usually in connection with aeronautic celebrations in those towns.

This review of the activities of the first "Good News" is not exhaustive. It aims to give rather a general than a specific picture, plus some of the "highlight" functions. It may merely be said in ending that the human sentimental instinct is not absent when "Good News", superseded by a more luxurious and larger and faster ship, passes from the scene.

W. W. WAYMACK



## Iowa City Municipal Airport

"This is the worst place I ever flew from", declared Thomas S. Baldwin after a short trial flight over the Johnson County Fair Grounds east of Iowa City on October 11, 1910. "You would have to give me \$20,000 instead of \$2000 to fly over the city", he continued, "and I hardly think I would want to do it for that."

Late the following afternoon Baldwin soared over the trees and stables which surrounded the fair grounds but a stiff breeze forced him down a quarter of a mile away. Dissatisfied with such a performance the angry crowd was granted wind checks. The next day Baldwin again took off, this time flying about three miles at a height of a hundred and fifty feet. It was probably the first successful airplane flight in Iowa! The cheers which greeted the "Air King" had barely subsided when he again took off, flew into the top-most branches of a tree, wavered a moment, and then, caught in the "maelstrom jaws" of an air pocket, crashed into some cattle sheds and fell. The plane was a complete wreck, but Baldwin escaped with minor bruises.

It is doubtful if the most air-minded witness of this spectacular flight would have predicted the astonishing development of aviation during the next twenty years. Certainly none would have dreamed



that a decade later Iowa City would become a strategic point on the transcontinental air mail route and boast one of the best airports in the midwest.

The World War taught the practicability of air transport. In 1917 Congress appropriated \$100,000 for the establishment of air mail service and authorized the War Department to furnish such planes as it no longer needed. On May 15, 1918, after a number of spasmodic exhibition mail flights, regular service was inaugurated between Washington and New York. Mail planes commenced flying between New York and Chicago on July 1, 1919.

During the following winter it was decided to extend the air mail service from Chicago to Omaha and on December 29th the Post Office Department telegraphed to Postmaster Max Mayer concerning the "length, breadth, and location of aviation field used by army near your city". The Department was "considering its use temporarily for mail flights to Omaha". After a hasty meeting with the officers of the Chamber of Commerce and a visit to the field Mayer wired: "Aviation field one and one-half miles southwest of post office west of river on Red Ball highway. Seven-tenths mile from street car. City phone in farm house. Transportation available at post office. Property of W. J. Benjamin. Field 440 yards square. Four-way landing, no trees or brush. No building for airplane. Temporary field only. Wire markings desired. Aviators report field first class."



About 1918 commercial flyers had discovered this level tract of pasture land and occasionally rented it to take up passengers. A few landings were also made by transient craft. On January 3, 1920, a special representative of the postal service, Herbert Blakeslee, arrived to inspect the local field. Blakeslee was delighted with the Benjamin tract, declaring it to be the best site for a field then in use by the air mail service and promptly recommended it as the central landing field between Chicago and Omaha.

A trial flight was made over the course by pilots Walter J. Smith and Farr A. Nutter two days later. Nutter followed the North Western railroad out of Chicago but, aided by his maps, he cut diagonally across country and arrived at Iowa City at 11:19 A. M., a few minutes ahead of Smith, who followed the Rock Island. Smith hopped off for Omaha with Nutter in the mail pit at 2:07 and completed the journey without mishap. After this trail-blazing flight, plans were promptly made to transport a regular consignment of mail on the eighth of January. Planes were to leave Chicago and Omaha at about the same time, stopping at Iowa City en route.

Early in the morning on January 8th a group of men gathered in the Benjamin pasture on the outskirts of Iowa City. Bonfires were lighted, and, like the Millerites of the "fabulous forties", they stood gazing steadfastly into the sky, waiting for evidence of a new kind of millenium. Several hours passed. Anxious and apprehensive, the men turned



away from the fire and were about to go home when suddenly, out of the misty haze, a low droning sound was heard. A moment later an airplane came zooming out of the sky, roaring noisily as it circled the field, landed perfectly, and taxied up to the little group of men who had awaited its arrival so anxiously. The first leg of the new Chicago-Omaha air mail had been successfully flown! Iowa City was the only landing in the State on this epochal trip.

The pilot on this pioneer flight, Walter J. Smith, leaped from the cockpit and ran to the fire to thaw out and enjoy a light lunch. Leaving Chicago at 8:29 the intrepid airman reached Iowa City at 10:17, thereby maintaining the "terrific speed" of a hundred and twenty miles an hour. Near DeKalb, Illinois, he had encountered a blinding snowstorm which forced him to descend to within five hundred feet of the earth to guide his plane over the frozen hills and prairies of Illinois and Iowa. Included in the four hundred pounds of mail were urgent dispatches to the mayor of Omaha, to General John J. Pershing, and other government officials. Meat for a banquet to be given in honor of Pershing was also aboard. Exactly half an hour after landing, pilot Smith made a perfect take-off, veered to the north, and then cut directly across country in the direction of Omaha where he arrived a few hours later.

The plane from Omaha failed to reach Iowa City. Although pilot Farr Nutter started at the same time Smith left Chicago, he encountered a stiff wind



all the way and was forced to land thirty miles east of Des Moines.

The first air mail dispatched from Iowa City was picked up by Smith on his return from Omaha. A ten pound pig was forwarded by Robert N. Carson to the manager of the Congress Hotel. Properly decorated for the occasion, the distinguished visitor from the tall corn State attracted much attention from newspaper reporters and camera men. But his popularity was all too short. A few days later Iowa City's first aerial mail played an important rôle at a dinner attended by Eddie Rickenbacker, the ace of American aviators. It was not until May 19th that pilot W. N. De Wald brought the first official consignment of air mail for Iowa City. It was a moving picture film destined for Maquoketa.

While hopes ran high at Iowa City the authorities at Washington suddenly decided that Des Moines should be the permanent intermediate station between Chicago and Omaha. William J. McCandless, superintendent of the Chicago-Omaha division, informed Iowa City business men that the airport would remain at Iowa City for at least ninety days, when the introduction of double-engined planes would permit a change in the location of the field. He admitted that Iowa City was better situated and had the advantage of an established airport.

Unfortunately, the niggardly appropriations meted out by Congress made it impossible for the Post Office Department to purchase or lease fields through-



out the midwest. It was hoped that each community would solve this problem. Iowa City was especially cordial to the various officials sent to inspect the field and manifested a genuine desire to coöperate in every possible way. Chris Yetter was made chairman of a committee of the Chamber of Commerce to secure funds sufficient to lease a landing field. Local business men responded cheerfully, each pledging sums of from two to five dollars a month. Bids were then sought on a number of prospective sites but the Benjamin tract was deemed the best and an agreement was drawn up whereby the Chamber of Commerce leased an eighty-eight acre flying field for \$2200 a year. No difficulty was ever experienced in the payment of an airport pledge. In 1922 the government took over the lease and in 1926 the field was reduced to sixty-eight acres and the rent cut down to \$1500.

The air field was all bustle during the first few months of 1920. M. K. Riddick was appointed manager and Robert R. Vogt of Iowa City was named his assistant. Riddick resigned after serving only one month and Hugh S. Long succeeded him. Regular mail service began between Chicago and Omaha on May 15, 1920. Piloted by W. N. De Wald, the east-bound plane arrived at Iowa City in safety but officials were a bit disturbed when the west-bound plane failed to make an appearance. Two days later a report from Ottumwa told of the landing of pilot C. Ray Benedict near that city. He had been blown off



his course, forced to land in a muddy field, and was unable to take off for several days. Poor marking facilities and landing fields, together with the archaic machines in use, served as deterring factors in the early annals of air mail history.

Despite such handicaps the Iowa City airport was particularly fortunate for there was no serious mishap either to planes or passengers. Only a few minor accidents occurred. Thus, on May 25, 1920, a machine turned turtle on hitting a rough piece of ground. Pilot McLaughlin unbuckled himself from the plane and stepped out with a smile, only slightly shaken. On his return McLaughlin again "cracked up". He continued to Chicago from whence he was sent to Washington to receive "further instructions" in the art of flying.

But a number of notable characters who were prominent in the early history of the Iowa City airport lost their lives in the service. On May 13, 1920, two days before the inauguration of regular air mail, the Iowa City airport lost a warm friend and supporter when Superintendent William J. McCandless was killed while inspecting the route from Omaha to Iowa City. Forced to land, a heavy gust of wind struck the DeHaviland plane in which he was flying, swept it into a tree, and wrecked it.

Genuine regret was felt when news was flashed to Iowa City of the death of Walter J. Smith at Indianapolis on September 8, 1922. Thousands had witnessed the flight and subsequent crash of Iowa



City's pioneer air mail scout on the preceding day at the Indianapolis Fair Grounds. When the Post Office Department asked for an appropriate name for the airport the local Chamber of Commerce voted to honor the name of pilot Walter J. Smith.

The inauguration of night flying between Chicago and Cheyenne on July 1, 1924, ushered in the most novel and thrilling phase of the air mail service. Hundreds saw the arrival of pilots Randolph Paige and D. C. Smith at 8:20 p.m. an hour ahead of schedule. But Smith Field had been the scene of a night flight as early as September, 1920, when residents of Iowa City gazed with "up-craned necks and distended eyes" at pilot Farr A. Nutter's spectacular flight from Williamsburg, Iowa, to the local field. The need of a regular uninterrupted transcontinental flight led to the installation of lighted skyways by the Post Office Department.

Smith Field was equipped with a fifty foot tower on which two powerful beacons revolved. One of these was of eight million candle power, while the other, to be used in foggy, stormy weather, was five hundred million candle power. A half billion candle power floodlight for use in night landing was also installed. In addition to these, a series of lights placed a hundred feet apart outlined the field. With this equipment installed Smith Field became one of the best night flying fields in the midwest.

Meanwhile a canvas tent had served two winters as a repair shop, while neither the Chamber of Com-



merce nor the national government appropriated funds for a hangar. However, when Iowa City became the terminus for the eastern division of the transcontinental air mail service in September, 1922, the Post Office Department advertised for bids for the erection of a hangar sixty-six by one hundred feet in size. The lower portion of the new building was made of cement blocks and a trussed roof allowed the storage of five mail planes.

Telegraph and telephone communication was not entirely practicable and one of the first improvements on the local field was the installation of a radio plant. By this means the air mail stations were able to keep in close communication with the progress of each plane and any mishap or change in schedule could be quickly communicated to the proper authorities. Smith Field was the first airport in Iowa to possess a radio station which made possible the issuance of instructions and the expeditious transaction of official business. Later a waiting room and general office building was erected.

When the Post Office Department adopted the policy of contracting with commercial companies for the transportation of air mail, a new situation arose. The work of the Post Office Department was then transferred to the newly created Aeronautics Branch of the Department of Commerce, which has since supervised the selection and improvement of the landing fields, the extension of lighted skyways, the licensing of pilots and mechanics, and the per-



formance of other details arising from air transportation.

The rapid strides in aviation, the efforts of other cities to obtain their own airports with none of the advantages which Iowa City already possessed, the presentation of the field equipment by the government to the city, the knowledge that the lease would not be renewed, and the realization of the sheer folly of letting slip so valuable a property after maintaining it for almost ten years led to a spirited campaign for municipal ownership of the airport.

On May 27, 1929, by a vote of 1916 to 757, the people of Iowa City approved of a bond issue of \$70,000 for the purchase and development of a municipal airport. The city council promptly appointed an airport committee composed of W. L. Bywater, Jacob Van der Zee, and Lou H. Kaufman. A topographical map of Smith Field was prepared for the State Railroad Commissioners, and under the authority of a new State law a hundred and ninety-two acres including the old air field was purchased for \$56,610.50. Within one brief decade, a pasture from which cattle had to be driven whenever a plane arrived was transformed into a municipal airport.

Only \$12,000 remained in the treasury to make the improvements needed to give Smith Field a first class rating. An expert from the United States Department of Commerce recommended using this sum on the original sixty-eight acres but such a policy seemed short-sighted. W. L. Bywater finally sug-



gested that financial aid be secured from the Boeing company in return for the free use of the field. Negotiations were opened at once and on May 7, 1930, a fifty-year contract was signed.

The city agreed to expend its remaining \$12,000 for "grading, draining, installing lighting equipment, and other improvements" while the company agreed to use a special fund for the same purpose. The company also agreed to "maintain the landing field in a state of reasonable condition and repair for safe landing", and supervise and manage said landing field and airport for and under the direction of the city. The company agreed to collect all fees due the city, keep the office and hangar repaired, operate and maintain both old and new lighting equipment at its own expense, and give a monthly report to the city council on the management and operation of the airport. In return the company was given exclusive use of the hangar and office, and free use of the field after the installation of the two improved runways which are to be a hundred and fifty feet wide by twenty-five hundred feet long.

Runways, a new hangar to be used exclusively for repairs to their own machines and those which alight at the field, together with minor improvements will involve the expenditure of almost \$90,000. When these changes are completed in October, 1930, the Iowa City Municipal Airport will represent a total investment of approximately \$200,000.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN



## Comment by the Editor

### ARGONAUTS OF THE AIR

When Jason sought the Golden Fleece, he first employed the skillful Argus to build a mighty ship with sails. He named the vessel *Argo*. A band of ardent heroes joined him in the quest. Strong Hercules and sagacious Nestor, courageous Theseus, swift Calais, and tuneful Orpheus were among the Argonauts. Through terrifying perils and graver hazards unsuspected, they piloted their craft to the kingdom of Colchis where Jason yoked the fiery bulls, sowed the teeth of the dragon, and finally, with the aid of Medea's charm, vanquished the crop of warriors and carried off the Golden Fleece. It was a glorious exploit.

In the present age and in a world grown small, though scarcely less mysterious, the modern argonaut soars aloft into the boundless sky alone upon his quest of the golden fleece of glory and reward. Embodied in one splendid personality are all the virtues that Jason's crew personified. Without the intervention of the gods, he sails the deep blue sky—the calmest and most treacherous of seas.

The ageless urge to do what no man else has done or dared to try impels as much the dauntless modern youth as he of ancient Greece to risk his life and all



in some magnificent adventure. The treasure and the danger then were in the land beyond the sea, whereas the unknown realm now lies above the clouds. Though the motives of ambition have remained the same, the present objects sought seem vastly more significant, for the conquest of the air will modify the lives of men far more than sailing vessels ever did.

Despite the explanation of the elements of superstition in terms of scientific formulae, the remorseless dragons of fire and storm and pestilence, which still constitute the sorcery of nature, are scarcely less formidable than in the days of yore. To fly the mail a thousand miles by night is just as thrilling as the passage of the Clashing Islands. The perils of a crossing of the north Atlantic in a little monoplane would have overawed the bold Ulysses. Whoever has the genius to build his own aerial *Argo* and the skill to guide it farther through the clouded skies than any man has flown before deserves a worthy place among the heroes of the world.

J. E. B.



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